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ABSTRACT

Adult participation in the United Kingdom in 2001 was examined through interviews with a weighted sample of 6,310 adults over age 17 across Great Britain with a boosted sample in Wales. The following were among the key findings: (1) for the first time in 20 years, there was a marked upswing in adults' participation in learning from the previous year (29% in 2001 versus 22% in 2000); (2) one in three men participated in learning versus one in four women; (3) people with access to the Internet were twice as likely to be learning; (4) the rise in participation rates among professionals and managers has accelerated steadily from 53% in 1996 to 67% in 2001, whereas participation among the least-skilled and poorest adults has nudged up from 26% to 28%; (5) a substantial majority of individuals aged 17-24 were current or recent participants in learning versus around half of those aged 25-54 and a third of those aged 55-64; (6) participation rates varied significantly by geographic region; and (7) people with recent experience of learning expected to undertake further study in the near future, whereas those who said that they had done no learning since school saw almost no likelihood of future participation. (Contains 16 tables.) (MN)

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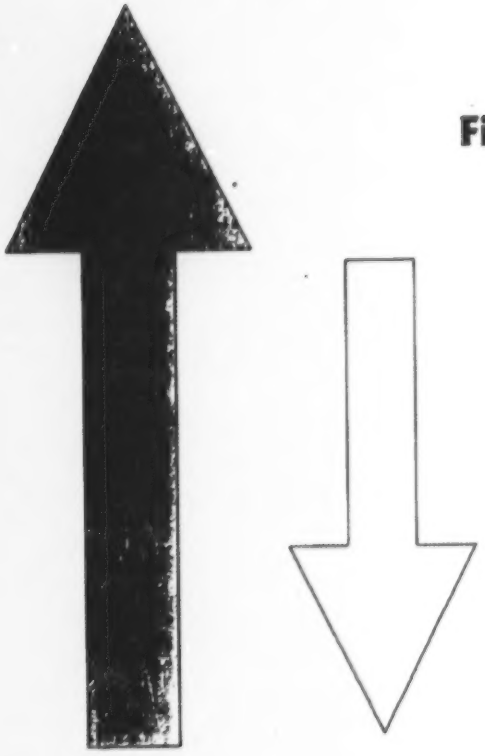
Winners and losers
in an expanding system

The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2001

Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett



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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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Headline findings

For the first time in 20 years there has been a marked upswing in adult participation in learning. The NIACE annual participation survey for Adult Learners' Week shows an overall rise from 22% who reported currently learning in 2000 to 29% this year, and 41% to 46% taking current and recent learners together. Men still get more learning opportunities with one in three men taking part, as against just over one in four women (Table 1). The survey, undertaken for NIACE by RSGB, interviewed a weighted sample of 6,310 adults over 17 across Great Britain, with a boosted sample in Wales, during the periods 30 March-3 April, 4-8 April, 6-10 April (Wales boost), 11-15 April and 13-17 April (Wales boost) 2001.

Despite the increased investment in public provision during the life of this government the overall picture had remained stubbornly stable up to 2000, as restructuring in industry, with its attendant loss of training opportunities, offset the expansion in post-school education. But now the combination of a full-employment economy and consistent commitment to expanding opportunities has made a difference.

The figures show some spectacular winners and losers. People with access to the internet are twice as likely to be learning as people without (Table 16). The rise in participation rates among professionals and managers has accelerated steadily through the life of this Government from 53% current/recent learners in 1996 to 67% now. By contrast social class DE – the least skilled and poorest groups – have nudged up from 26% to 28% over the same period (Figure 1). White collar, skilled and semi-skilled workers have increased their participation rates this year for the first time. Taken together these trends show that the case for a learning society is now understood across a much broader range of society.

However, there is nothing to be complacent about. The distribution of the expansion in opportunity is heavily weighted to the educationally privileged, to the young, and to people with jobs. Working status has a significant impact on participation (Table 4). Among the sharpest increases over the lifetime of this Government has been the increase in part-time workers' participation. Equally striking is the way retired people have been scarcely affected by the expansion of opportunity. This will surely present a policy challenge for the next Government, given the demographic changes underway. In an ageing society, there remains a huge task to construct learning opportunities which are attractive and accessible to older people. The prizes – improved health, extended economic activity, but above all prolonged active citizenship – must be policy goals into the new century. But the figures show we have a long way to go to involve the vast bulk of older people in the learning society.

If the overall picture is of increased opportunity, the swings in participation in the regions of Great Britain are surprisingly sharp (Table 5). Participation rates in the Southwest and the Northwest have risen sharply since 1996, as against a gentle decline in the East Midlands, and a sharper one in Yorkshire and Humberside. The picture in the West Midlands shows the complexity of participation data –now one percentage point higher than in 1990. During the mid-1990s public provision in the region expanded sharply, but was offset by the decline in learning at work, as Rover and Lucas shed thousands of learning-rich jobs. The current figures illustrate the effect of a robust economy taken alongside expansion in further, higher and community education. Figures for the devolved administrations continue stubbornly low.

A consistent message of NIACE annual surveys is that people who have had recent experience of learning expect to undertake further study in the near future, while those who say they have done no learning since school see almost no likelihood of future participation. The 2001 survey reports 33% saying they had done no learning since school (36% in 2000). But when this group was asked about future participation 86% said they were unlikely to take up learning, and only 12% thought there was much possibility at all (Table 10).

This is the group that is the focus of the national target for adult participation. The survey suggests that for the hardest-to-reach the case for a learning society has still to be made. However, across the lifetime of the Government there has been a significant widening of participation. True the learning rich have been quickest to do more, but the message is spreading. I trust policy makers will continue to look carefully at participation data to identify who is not yet reached, and tweak policies to ensure that they get a fair chance.

Alan Tuckett, Director, NIACE

Technical Notes

6,310 adults were asked the following questions from 30 March to 17 April 2001:

> "Learning can mean practising, studying or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full time, or part time, done at home, at work, or in another place like a college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished."

Turning to learning in general: Which one of these statements most applies to you?
01: I am currently doing some learning activity
02: I have done some learning activity in the last 3 years
03: I have studied or learned but it was over 3 years ago
04: I have not studied or learned since I left full-time education

How likely are you to take up learning in the next 3 years?
01: very likely
02: fairly likely
03: fairly unlikely
04: very unlikely

The 1996 survey included Northern Ireland, which reports lower levels of participation, whilst the 2001 survey is limited to Great Britain. However, recalculating the participation rates for 1996 to take out the Northern Ireland sample leaves the Great Britain overall rate in 1996 unchanged from those reported for the UK as a whole. Despite the size of this sample, it does not offer sufficiently detailed data to report on patterns of participation by ethnicity or people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

NIACE undertakes periodic targeted surveys to identify the participation trends among people from black and other minority ethnic groups and plans a parallel exercise for people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Participation

Participation and gender

- The survey shows that 29% of adults are currently learning, an increase of a third on last year's figures.

- More men than women are learning – almost 1 in 3 men are currently learning, just over 1 in 4 women are learning.

Table 1: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, men and women compared

	total	men	women
base – all respondents = 100%	6,310	2,825	3,485
current learning	29	32	27
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	17	17
all current/recent learning	46	49	44
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	20	21	19
none since leaving full-time education/don't know	33	29	37

Participation and social class

- There has been an increase in participation across the range.

- However, the learning divide is alive and well – 12% of professional and managerial workers (ABs) have not participated in any learning since leaving school, compared with 52% of DEs.

Table 2: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by social class

	total	AB	C1	C2	DE
base – all respondents = 100%	6,310	941	1,605	1,356	2,408
current learning	29	47	39	23	16
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	20	20	18	12
all current/recent learning	46	67	59	41	28
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	20	21	20	21	19
none since leaving full-time education/don't know	33	12	22	37	52

Participation and age

- A substantial majority of those aged between 17 and 24 are current/recent participants.

- Around half of those in the 25-54 age group are current/recent participants, representing a marked increase on last year's figures.

- A third of those aged 55-64 are current/recent participants.

- Current/recent participation falls dramatically for those aged 65 and over.

Table 3: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by age

	total	17-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
base – all respondents = 100%	6,310	271	450	1,126	1,209	994	854	799	607
current learning	29	66	49	35	33	27	19	15	8
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	16	21	22	22	21	14	7	4
all current/recent learning	46	82	70	57	55	48	33	22	12
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	20	2	8	16	16	22	26	29	33
none since leaving full-time education/ don't know	33	16	22	27	29	30	40	48	55

Participation and employment

- As many part-time workers are current/recent participants as full-time workers. This represents a major increase in their participation.

- People outside of the labour market have very much lower participation levels compared with those within it.

Table 4: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by working status

	total	full-time	part-time	retired	unemployed	not working
base – all respondents = 100%	6,310	2,215	883	1,730	284	974
current learning	29	35	36	14	22	16
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	23	22	8	22	15
all current/recent learning	46	58	58	22	44	31
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	20	17	15	31	15	20
none since leaving full-time education/don't know	33	25	28	47	40	49

Participation in the regions

- The gap between the highest and lowest participating regions is widening.
- The Northwest and Southwest have the highest levels of participation.
- Wales and Scotland have the lowest levels of participation.

Table 5: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by region		
	Base – all respondents = 100%	**Current/recent participation**
North West	677	54
South West	577	53
East Anglia	199	52
Greater London	825	52
South East	1,023	47
West Midlands	516	47
Total: Great Britain	**6,310**	**46**
East Midlands	395	45
North	375	44
Yorkshire & Humberside	570	42
Wales	589	39
Scotland	564	36

Trends in participation

Trends in participation and gender

- Participation for both men and women has increased over the last 5 years.

- Men continue to be more likely to participate than women and the gap is not narrowing.

Table 6: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, 1996-2001, men and women compared

	total		men		women	
	1996	**2001**	**1996**	**2001**	**1996**	**2001**
base – all respondents = 100%	4,551	6,310	2,208	2,825	2,343	3,485
current learning	23	29	25	32	21	27
recent learning (in the last 3 years)	17	17	18	17	17	17
all current/recent learning	40	46	43	49	38	44
past learning (more than 3 years ago)	23	20	25	21	21	19
none since leaving full-time education	36	33	31	29	41	37

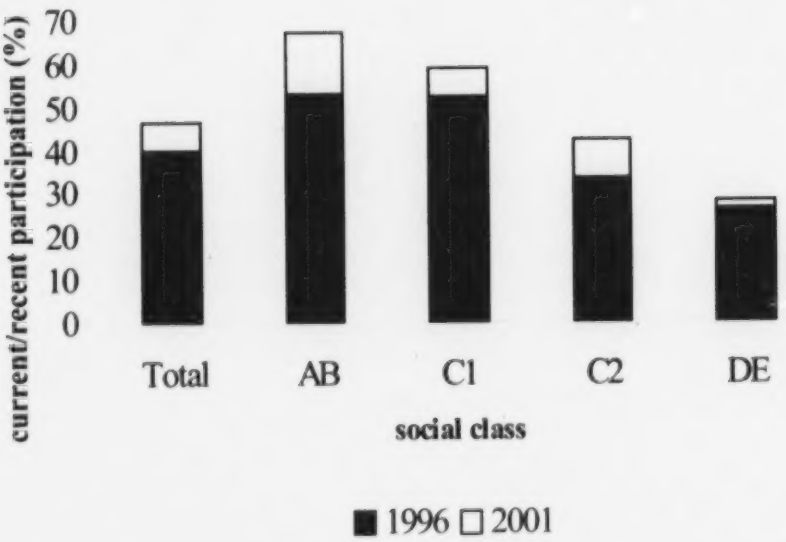
Trends in participation and social class

- Between 1996 and 2001, participation rates in all social groups have increased.

- A large increase in participation of ABs was first identified in the 1999 survey, with participation continuing to rise since then. Large increases in participation of C1s and C2s are reported in the 2001 survey for the first time.

- For the first time, in the 2001 survey, there has been an increase in participation of DEs.

Figure 1: CURRENT/RECENT LEARNING, by social class, 1996 and 2001 comapred



Trends in participation and age

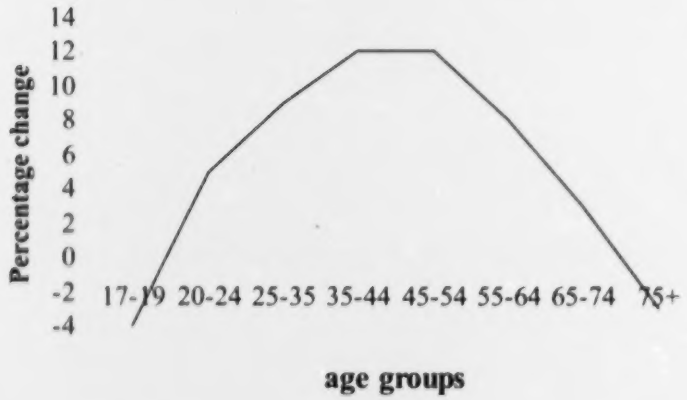
- Between 1996 and 2001, participation rates in all age groups, except for those aged between 17-19 and those aged over 75, have increased.

Table 7: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by age, 1996 and 2001 compared

	1996	2001	Percentage change
total sample	40	46	+6
17-19	86	82	-4
20-24	65	70	+5
25-35	48	57	+9
35-44	43	55	+12
45-54	36	48	+12
55-64	25	33	+8
65-74	19	22	+3
75+	15	12	-3

NB: percentages are of the horizontal group

Figure 2: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by age, between 1996 and 2001



Trends in participation and employment

- The greatest gains in participation have been among part-time and full-time workers.

- Surprisingly, there is also a considerable increase in participation among people who are not working.

Table 8: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by working status, 1996 and 2001 compared

	1996	2001	Percentage change
total sample	40	46	+6
full-time	49	58	+9
part-time	42	58	+16
retired	20	22	+2
unemployed	40	44	+4
not working	23	31	+8

NB: percentages are of the horizontal group

Trends in participation in the regions

- Between 1996 and 2001 there have been considerable regional swings in participation.

- The Northwest, Southwest and West Midlands have experienced the greatest percentage increase in participation over the last 5 years.

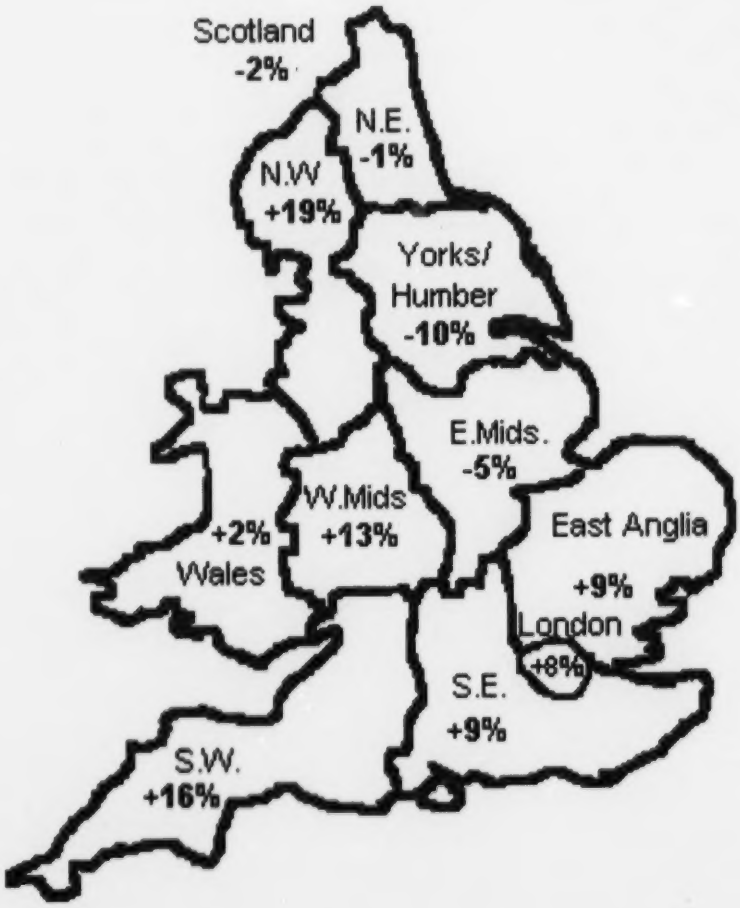
- The East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside have experienced the greatest decline in participation over the last 5 years.

- Scotland and Wales report significantly lower participation rates than English regions.

Table 9: CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING, by region, 1996 and 2001 compared

	1996	2001	Percentage change
North West	35	54	+19
South West	37	53	+16
West Midlands	35	47	+13
East Anglia	43	52	+9
South East	38	47	+9
Greater London	44	52	+8
Total: Great Britain	**40**	**46**	**+6**
Wales	37	39	+2
North	45	44	-1
Scotland	38	36	-2
East Midlands	50	45	-5
Yorkshire & Humberside	52	42	-10

Figure 3: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN CURRENT/RECENT PARTICIPATION, by region, 1996-2001



Future intentions

Gender and future intentions to learn

- The survey reinforces the view that current participation affects future intentions to learn.

- 91% of current learners report that they are likely to take up learning in the future.

- 86% of those who have not been involved in learning since leaving full-time education say that they are unlikely to take up learning in the future.

Table 10: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by gender and learning status

	total	men	women	current learners	recent learners	past learners	none since full-time
base – all respondents = 100%	6,310	2,825	3,485	1,719	1,046	1,291	2,093
very likely	31	33	29	75	36	8	3
fairly likely	18	17	18	16	34	20	9
total likely	**49**	**50**	**47**	**91**	**70**	**28**	**12**
fairly unlikely	11	11	10	4	14	17	11
very unlikely	38	38	43	4	13	52	75
total unlikely	**49**	**47**	**51**	**8**	**27**	**69**	**86**
don't know	2	2	2	1	3	3	2

- Although current/recent participation has increased by 6% between 1996 and 2001, there has been a sharper rise of 11% in future intentions to learn.

- Amongst current/recent learners there has been an even more dramatic increase in the number who say they are likely to take part.

- Among those who have not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education, there has been a 1% fall in future intentions to learn.

- The number of people who say that they are unlikely to learn in the future has fallen by 6%.

Table 11: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by gender and learning status, 1996 and 2001 compared

	total	men	women	current learners	recent learners	past learners	none since full-time
total likely							
1996	38	39	37	72	59	26	13
2001	49	50	47	91	70	28	12
percentage change	+11	+11	+10	+19	+11	+2	-1
total unlikely							
1996	55	55	56	20	35	66	81
2001	49	47	51	8	27	69	86
percentage change	-6	-8	-5	-12	-8	+3	+5

Social class and future intentions to learn

- Two thirds of people in social class AB say that they are likely to take up learning in the future, a 20% increase since 1996.

- Around 60% of people in social class C1 say that they are likely to take up learning in the future, a 14% increase since 1996.

- Less than half of C2s say that they are likely to take up learning in the future, although an increase of 11% indicates that the belief in the value of learning is more widely accepted.

- Among DEs, there has been a 6% increase in the number of people who say that they are likely to take up learning in the future. However, the number of people in this group who say that they are unlikely to learn in the future has also slightly increased.

Table 12: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by social class, 1996 and 2001 compared

	total	AB	C1	C2	DE
total likely					
1996	38	46	45	34	28
2001	49	66	59	45	34
percentage change	+11	+20	+14	+11	+6
total unlikely					
1996	55	48	49	59	63
2001	49	32	39	53	64
percentage change	-6	-16	-10	-6	+1

Age and future intentions to learn

- Between 1996 and 2001 there has been a solid rise in future intentions to learn among the working age population of between 11%-16%

- There has also been a modest 5% increase in the number of those in the 65-74 age group who say that they are likely to learn in the future.

- Those aged over 75 still seem to be convinced that the learning society is not for them. There has been no change in the number of people in this age group who say they are likely to learn in the future.

Table 13: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by age, 1996 and 2001 compared

	total	17-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
total likely									
1996	38	71	58	49	47	37	20	14	10
2001	49	83	73	65	61	49	31	19	10
percentage change	+11	+12	+15	+16	+14	+12	+11	+5	0
total unlikely									
1996	55	19	35	42	45	57	76	82	83
2001	49	17	17	33	37	48	67	78	89
percentage change	-6	-2	-18	-9	-8	-9	-9	-4	+6

Employment and future intentions to learn

- Roughly as may full-time workers, part-time workers and those who are unemployed expect to be learning in the future.

- Four out of five retired people see learning as having little to do with their lives.

Table 14: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by working status, 1996 and 2001 compared

	total	full-time	part-time	retired	unemployed	not working
Total likely						
1996	38	47	40	16	44	30
2001	49	62	59	19	58	40
percentage change	+11	+15	+19	+3	+14	+10
total unlikely						
1996	55	46	54	80	46	63
2001	49	37	38	79	39	58
percentage change	-6	-9	-16	-1	-7	-5

Future intentions to learn in the regions

- Against the trend of the survey, within the East Midlands and the North there has been a rise in the number of people who do not expect to be learning in the future.

Table 15: FUTURE INTENTIONS TO TAKE UP LEARNING, by region, 1996 and 2001 compared

	total likely			total unlikely		
	1996	2001	percentage change	1996	2001	percentage change
North West	32	53	+21	61	46	-15
South West	36	54	+18	57	45	-12
East Anglia	41	59	+18	50	41	-9
Wales	30	45	+15	59	53	-6
West Midlands	37	51	+14	51	48	-3
South East	37	50	+13	55	47	-8
Total: Great Britain	**38**	**49**	**+11**	**55**	**49**	**-6**
Greater London	44	52	+8	50	45	-5
Scotland	34	41	+7	61	57	-4
Yorkshire & Humberside	41	45	+4	52	52	0
East Midlands	46	46	0	51	52	+1
North	43	42	-1	54	56	+2

Access to the internet

- Figures for access to the internet reflect a pattern in the system and highlight that the digital divide continues to reinforce the learning divide.

Table 16: PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING AND FUTURE INTENTIONS TO LEARN, by access to the internet		
	access to the internet	**no access to the internet**
base – all respondents =100%	2,346	3,556
current/recent participation in learning	67%	32%
future intentions to learn	70%	35%

Winners and losers in an expanding system

Fiona Aldridge and Alan Tuckett

For the first time in twenty years there has been a marked upswing in adult participation in learning. However, there is nothing to be complacent about. The distribution of the expansion in opportunity is heavily weighted to the educationally privileged, to the young, and to people with jobs. The survey suggests that for the hardest-to-reach the case for a learning society has still to be made. However, across the lifetime of the Government there has been a significant widening of participation.

Launched during Adult Learners' Week 2001, *Winners and losers in an expanding system* builds on NIACE's previous surveys of participation in adult learning (*The Learning Divide*, Sargant *et al*, 1997, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 016 1, £20.00 and *The Learning Divide Revisited*, Sargant, 2000, NIACE, ISBN 1 86201 088 9, £22.95).

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